Antagonistic Tolerance and Other Port Town Paradoxes

Isaac Land

In an influential essay published a quarter century ago, Rhoads Murphey remarked: "Port functions, more than anything else, make a city cosmopolitan, a word which does not necessarily mean 'sophisticated' but rather hybrid."[1] He went on to explain:

> A port city is open to the world, or at least to a varied section of it. In it races, cultures, and ideas as well as goods from a variety of places jostle, mix, and enrich each other and the life of the city… [However] as a city loses most of its port functions, it loses these qualities, perhaps most of all its cosmopolitanism.[2]

Michael Pearson, in his recent work on the Indian Ocean, has quoted these passages approvingly and affirmed that on the coast "experience, that best of masters, has gone far to unteach the lessons of ignorance, intolerance, and national aversion."[3] Is the term "cosmopolitan port town," then, as redundant as "trackless wilderness"?

In maritime history, "cosmopolitan" appears in straightforward fashion as an adjective, but it has scarcely made an appearance as a category of

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analysis in its own right. This lack of critical engagement is surprising for two reasons. First, port towns – as the quotation from Murphey indicates – have long ranked among the classic examples of cosmopolitan societies, suggesting that maritime history has a role to play in the conversation about them. Second, while the idea of the cosmopolitan has fascinated anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, and cultural historians, they have also found it a perplexing, ambiguous, and highly contestable term.

In a skeptical overview, Henk Driessen has warned that while it is undoubtedly true that "maritime towns have functioned as hinges between empires, continents, trading blocs and nation states," the claim of cosmopolitanism still requires proof. He refers to the "assumed congeniality" of port town peoples and concedes only that particular communities were "perceived as cosmopolitan."[4] Taking note of the powerful role played by the nostalgia of displaced elites in constructions of a cosmopolitan past in the port towns of the Levant, he questions whether "the evoked image of cosmopolitanism [bears] any relationship to a lived social practice."[5] Since "cosmopolitan discourses are easier to document and analyze than lifestyles, for which direct evidence seems to be sparser and more difficult to access," we are left with only a vague sense of the ways that a cosmopolitan spirit manifested in everyday life, and a shortage of empirically-informed studies.[6]

Studying these communities under stress, or at the moment of their collapse, may offer a chance to observe the strength or weakness of cosmopolitanism with some precision. Salonica, Smyrna, Zanzibar and Rangoon each changed fatefully in the period of the twentieth century most closely associated with the dismemberment of empires. Pinpointing this wave of collapses as a phenomenon of the early- to mid-twentieth century also permits us to historicize something that has been periodized rather crudely as a prelapsarian Golden Age followed by a Downfall. This article is organized around four recent books that complicate that picture.[7]

Despite the vigorous life of the cosmopolitan port town in anecdote and in fictional treatments such as Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, the academic literature on this subject is still in its infancy. I will echo Driessen in emphasizing that my aims are mainly "to elicit debate and to suggest an agenda for future research."[8] The need for comparative book reviews and

synthetic overviews is best illustrated by the fact that none of the books under review here cite each other. Too often in the academic literature, a great cosmopolitan port is portrayed quite simply as unique – "that's how it was in Odessa" – without even generalizing to other, similar communities in the same region.[9] With this in mind, it is less surprising (but no less unfortunate) that the discussion of these issues in the Indian Ocean has taken place without reference to the rise and fall of tolerance in the Levantine ports of the eastern Mediterranean.

The work of centuries was undone with alarming speed. Is this, in itself, proof of the inherent fragility of cosmopolitan sentiments in general? An alternative interpretation would be that city-states (as legally distinct entities or as de facto zones of exception) would not fare well in an age of nationalism. As Carola Hein has noted, by the late nineteenth century, "Ships coming into harbour in Constantinople, Smyrna, or Salonica, in Hong Kong, Canton, or Shanghai would be greeted by European-style architecture, even if the cities beyond the waterfront took on a very different aspect…"[10] In some cases, the exceptional status of the port carried with it not only the memory of European gunboat diplomacy but also the taint of a little-loved and soon-to-be-obsolete monarchy or sultanate. The so-called "free ports," concessions, and capitulations of the early twentieth century were the last examples of the network of trading depots, extraterritorial zones, and fortified islands developed by European globalizers since the days of Vasco da Gama. As Çağlar Keyder has put it, the port cities "flourished in liminal spaces where Europe could expand because the local state receded… They emerged as specific urban forms mediating the expansion of the world economy into weak agrarian empires."[11]

Of course, Greeks, Armenians, and overseas Chinese were not merely protegées and *comprador* agents doing a distant empire's bidding. They built their own networks and devised political and commercial projects that furthered their own interests.[12] Some scholars have likened the operations of this early "polycultural bourgeoisie" to the "global city" concept popularized recently by the sociologist Saskia Sassen.[13] The global city is a site of both cosmopolitanism and advanced production.[14] Sassen's original examples included the transnational elite communities of the top law firms, accounting firms and money managers. The neoliberal global city is

tolerant, but in a calculated way; it refuses to allow minor details like language, religion, or ideology to stand in the way of making money. As a Lebanese President once said of Beirut, "nothing is forbidden except an empty pocket, in which case nothing is forgiven."[15] It is quite possible to recruit, accommodate, and embrace useful strangers of all colors and creeds while also imposing savage socio-economic segregation.[16] If the revenge of the hinterland came so easily and naturally as soon as decolonization permitted it, that is a disquieting verdict on the very idea of privileged cosmopolitan enclaves itself.

Does the very nature of port towns dictate a certain kind of cosmopolitan outlook? Clearly this is dependent, among other things, upon the technology level; no one would propose that today's heavily automated container shipping ports and instant electronic communication require cheek-by-jowl multicultural coexistence. Yet the destruction of the port towns under discussion here took place before the container shipping revolution had gained much momentum (or in the case of Smyrna, had even been invented). This was not the result of technological change making the old polyglot workforce obsolete, or even of economic decline. These ports were cut down in full flower.

In much of the academic discussion of cosmopolitanism, there is an unstated assumption that polyglot communities are tolerant communities. Part of the problem is that we have misread the evidence. A polyglot shoeshine boy or a bilingual president of the Chamber of Commerce is not *ipso facto* a paragon of empathy or of intercultural understanding. New theoretical work is opening up a spectrum of possibilities here. The philosopher Wendy Brown, in her book *Regulating Aversion*, has drawn attention to the ways that the very notion of tolerance contains within it an element of distaste.[17] In that sense, the fragility was built in from the beginning. Another philosopher, Kwame Anthony Appiah, has remarked on the durable nature of "incompletely theorized agreements" such as the informal coexistence long characteristic of the Levantine port towns.[18] If circumstances change, however, the very vagueness of the underlying justification may come back to haunt the community, which tolerates but does not know why it does so.

The sociologist Elijah Anderson has shown how coexistence in localized

pockets of an urban area – such as a downtown business district during working hours – may actually be an exceptional space that contrasts vividly with the segregated residential neighborhoods. Rather than expressing a civic identity or a deeply felt conviction, Anderson's "cosmopolitan canopy" is a "confusing space" where only a fragile civility prevails. With this in mind, Anderson challenges the assumption that any city, as a whole, could have a unified cosmopolitan spirit; rather, he posits "ethnos" (ethnocentric types who prefer to stick with their own kind) and "cosmos" (who prefer diverse company in every situation) mingling in public spaces but interpreting that experience quite differently from each other.[19]

Another sociologist, Ash Amin, has reviewed the scholarship on multiculturalism in contemporary urban spaces, from Chinese take-outs to "common ground" in daycares and community vegetable gardens. He warns: "Habitual contact in itself, is no guarantor of cultural exchange. It can entrench group animosities and identities, through repetitions of gender, class, race, and ethnic codes…"[20] He suggests that durable coexistence is built on something other than tolerance: "Local multicultures are borne out of the continual renewal of an equal and discursive public, so that the contest between claimants can become one between friendly enemies (agonism) rather than antagonists."[21] Amin's concepts neatly capture both the apparent fragility of cosmopolitan arrangements, and their well-documented resilience. A state of friendly enmity, however, is not very far from an open struggle for dominance.

One of the sharpest, and most acerbic, observations in this vein came in 2002, when Robert M. Hayden coined the term "antagonistic tolerance" to describe what went on at contested holy sites, such as the Greek churches in the Balkans that had been converted into mosques, and Muslim structures in India erected on the site of Hindu devotional pilgrimages.[22] Examining the litigation and other patterns of complaint going back decades and even centuries, he challenged the prevailing belief that the long-standing practice of sharing such sites amounted to syncretism, or indicated that religious identities were "fluid". Instead, he drew attention to the power relationships involved and asserted that the only tolerance at work here was negative. This is the kind of tolerance that only comes into play because neither side can do away with the other.

What maritime historians can take away from these theoretical insights is that while tolerance in some form clearly correlates with traditional port town activity, regimes of coexistence always contain the potential for tipping in one direction or another. With that in mind, the "grand geopolitical realignment" explanation for the collapse of the cosmopolitan port towns probably needs to be combined with an awareness of the internal instabilities that could oscillate out of control. Phillip Mansel captures the contradictions here when he remarks that a city like Beirut was simultaneously "an incubator and pacifier of nationalisms."[23] Indeed, some of the very port towns most legendary for their long histories of coexistence birthed uncompromising nationalist strongmen. Ataturk was from Salonica. Nasser was from Alexandria. While in a few places, such as Smyrna, the end of the old order came in the form of an armed invasion from outside, the port towns themselves supplied foot soldiers for militant, nationalist, or sectarian groups. If coexistence as a "lived social practice" is such an exemplary way of life, why did it leave those who had personally experienced its benefits so unimpressed? These questions impel us to examine more closely the local circumstances of coexistence and the tenor of cosmopolitan life just before its collapse.

Salonica

In *Salonica: City of Ghosts*, Mark Mazower relates the rise and fall of one of the most diverse cities of the eastern Mediterranean. Today located in northern Greece and occupied almost exclusively by Greeks, Ottoman Salonica was polyglot. The bootblacks could speak seven languages; foreign sailors thronged on Frank Street; Bulgarian carters came in from the countryside. The neighborhoods closest to the harbor were the most densely settled and the most Jewish. Jews handled cargo, helped passengers with their luggage, and hawked wares, including sexual favors. "As late as 1912," Mazower notes, "the docks stood silent on the Jewish Sabbath."[24] Religions seem to have mingled as well as people. The concept of going "to seek consolation at the graves of holy men," originally an Islamic practice called *ziyaret*, became a local Jewish custom; they also adopted the Arabic term

for it. Saint George was reborn as Mousa Baba, and Christian women lit candles at his tomb.[25]

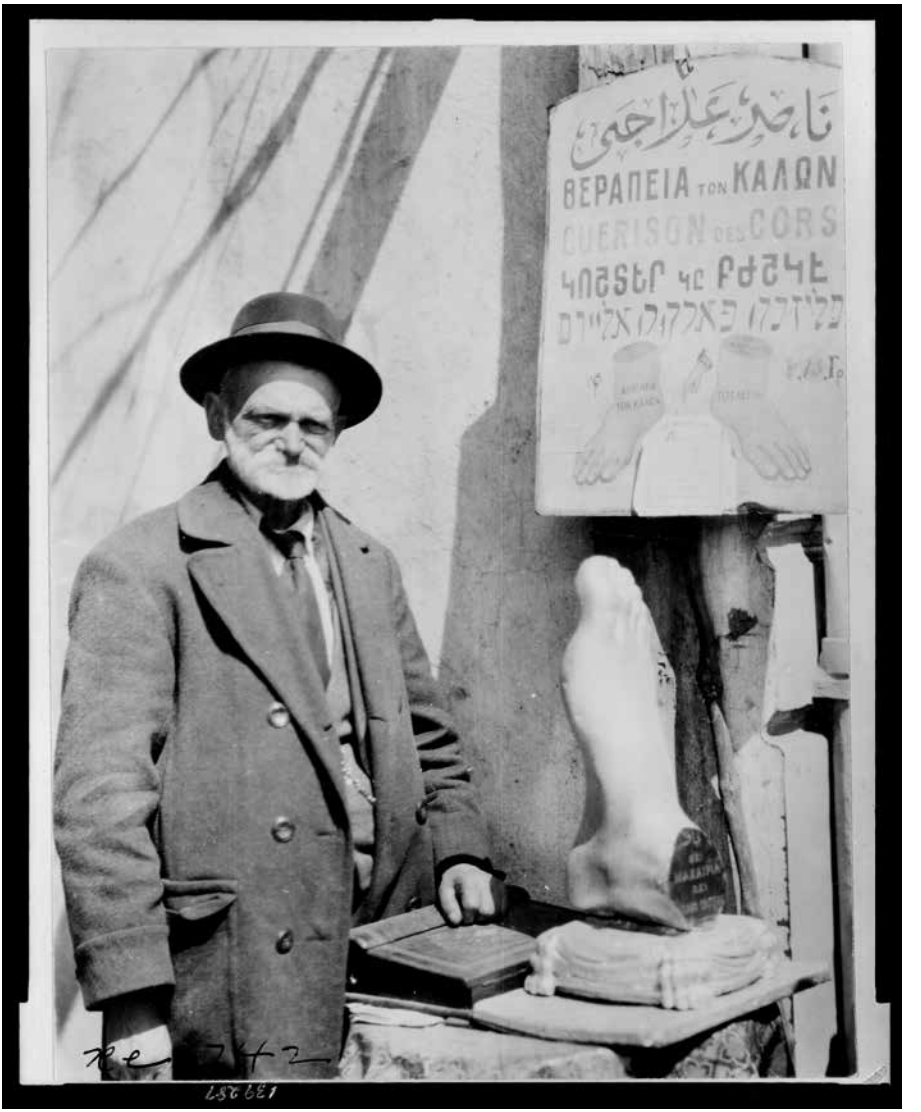
Despite this long history of physical cohabitation, encounters on the street were often fraught with danger – it was said that janissaries would "kill a man for a salad."[26] It was always possible to retreat into one's own ethnic or religious enclave, possibly muttering imprecations as you left. Mazower quotes one in Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) which translates as "your eye up my ass."[27] An Ottoman traveler compiled the greetings and salutations of the Albanians, ranging from "Eat shit!" "I'll fuck your mother," "I'll fuck your wife" and "I'll fart in your nose."[28]

What was the purpose of this strange Albanian glossary? Was it an early warning system allowing the visitor to interpret intent, and plan their next steps? The man who says "I'll fart in your nose" is, perhaps, merely insouciant. He may be expressing scorn about a price that he thinks is insultingly high (or insultingly low). However, the man who says, in the same tone of voice, "I'll fuck your mother" may be itching to pull a knife. In that way, knowing each language group's worst insults might be a street survival skill. Or was it necessary to use the insults oneself? Were the demands of daily verbal jousting in the streets such that people felt the need to defeat their neighbors by insulting him masterfully in their own language?

The act of capturing another group's armory of insults may have something in common with another famous feature of Salonican culture, the act of colonizing another group's saints by reinterpreting them as part of one's own faith tradition. For Saint George to survive as Mousa Baba, or vice versa, could have been a true syncretic union of faith traditions, or just another way to display the dominance of one's own group.

Maria Vassilikou has captured the unpredictable, polyvalent nature of these everyday interactions in her list of possible binary "couplets":

Greek merchants	vs.	Jewish merchants
Greek Orthodox Christians	vs.	Jewish Jesus-killers
Anti-Ottoman Greeks	vs.	Philo-Ottoman Jews
Greeks and Jews (minorities)	vs.	Ruling Muslim population
Greeks and Jews (diaspora peoples)	vs.	Ottoman imperialists
Greeks and Jews (ancient heritage)	vs.	"upstart" Ottomans[29]



Polyglot street vendor in Salonica. Source: US Library of Congress.

When combined with other possible lines of affinity uniting the various facets of the ethnoreligious kaleidoscope (she mentions Greeks and Italians uniting at the opera to cheer for a "Christian" singer against a "Jewish" one), this suggests that inter-communal relations could vacillate unpredictably between alliance and antagonism depending on context, personal preference, and – no doubt – opportunism.[30]

One of the most distinctive features of cosmopolitan communities, however, is the possibility of a subject position that simply rejected the familiar binary oppositions altogether. Salonica's *Ma'min* certainly confounded any attempt at categorization. These were the Jews who followed the seventeenth-century prophet Sabbatai Zevi. Zevi first proclaimed himself the Jewish Messiah and then converted to Islam (changing his name to Aziz Mehmed Efendi). Zevi was wildly popular in Salonica, and while his followers initially found his conversion confusing, some of them decided that it must be part of some greater plan and followed his example. These Jewish converts to Islam, known as *Ma'min*, still spoke Ladino at home, and were widely suspected of secretly practicing Judaism, though Mazower writes that "in fact they were evolving over time into a distinctive heterodox Muslim sect, much influenced by the Sufi orders."[31] In the nineteenth century, the *Ma'min* remained a distinct group within Salonica, embracing "European learning… secular knowledge, political radicalism and freemasonry."[32] *Ma'min* "economics professors, businessmen and lawyers were among the leading activists" behind the Young Turk movement in 1908 and they supplied three cabinet ministers to the Young Turk government.[33] Mazower also describes a twentieth-century Jewish spiritualist and faith healer from Salonica who believed that she was guided by the spirit of a Muslim saint who had appeared to her in a graveyard. Clearly Ottoman Salonica provided an environment in which some people felt free to be very inventive with their identity and their subject position.

Greek nationalism had little room for this ambiguity. The military decline of the Ottoman Empire offered opportunities to redraw the borders, and some Greek patriots expected to push forward as far as Constantinople and reclaim Byzantine holy places like Saint Sophia. The fact that Salonica now contained few Greeks was a detail that could be corrected. The early twentieth century witnessed a massive population exchange as Turks fled what was now Greece and, later, Greeks fled what was now Turkey.

Salonica's large Jewish population remained until World War Two. As in other communities, many non-Jews in Salonica benefited from the redistribution of Jewish property, housing, and businesses. While some Christians shed tears, the President of Salonica's Chamber of Commerce remained "cold and passive" at the sight of a centuries-old Jewish community boarding the train to Auschwitz. Mazower draws attention to this criminal passivity, "despite the man's many and strong ties to Jewish firms – so strong indeed that he spoke Judeo-Spanish."[34] As this quick pivot illustrates, calculated choices are always subject to recalculation. By 1943, the President was probably already well along with his German lessons.

Smyrna/Izmir

Philip Mansel, in his highly readable study of Smyrna, Alexandria, and Beirut, describes both the splendor of port towns that were said to have found "the elixir of coexistence" and their subsequent catastrophe as each fell prey to the ambitions of narrow nationalist movements and the revenge of powerful rival cities deeper inland (Alexandria to Cairo, Beirut to Damascus, and Smyrna to Ankara).[35] One trait that distinguished Mansel's trio was the large European population of expatriate merchants and entrepreneurs. Some French families, for example, lived in Smyrna for generations. This brought a serious European political and military presence as well to all three ports, especially in the nineteenth century – the golden age of capitulations and extraterritoriality. In the cases of Alexandria and Beirut, this developed to the point of outright colonial rule.

It is possible to portray the Levantine ports as bastions of pragmatism, plutocracies where money counted for more than race or religious creed. Yet, in her *Ottoman Izmir,* Sibel Zandi-Sayek enumerates a number of examples that straddle the unstable territory between antagonistic tolerance and friendly enmity. Nineteenth-century reformers added the Sultan's birthday to the traditional list of Muslim holidays, and invited every ethnic and faith-based community – in addition to the foreign consulates – to outdo each other in their public professions of loyalty and admiration. Actual visits by the Sultan (one in 1850 and another in 1863) were marked

by extravagant "street decorations and night-time illumination" extending even to the ships in the harbor, and reinforcing "the appearance of a unified populace."[36] These kinds of demonstrations took on significance as a form of self-affirmation, but also as a competitive display for the benefit of rival groups.

Other holidays accentuated the city's divisions with no fig leaf of friendly competition: "Jews considered it unsafe to be seen near working-class Greek neighborhoods before Passover as unsubstantiated rumors that Jews kidnapped Christian children for religious rites regularly resurfaced every year."[37] Paradoxically, Greek Smyrniots also visited Jewish neighborhoods when they were illuminated for Purim – itself a holiday commemorating the Jews' deliverance from communal violence in ancient Persia.[38] Holiday tensions also recurred between different Christian groups. Corpus Christi parades by Latin Catholics made a point of marching through Orthodox neighborhoods, and the "common practice of discharging firearms on the streets during the Greek Orthodox Easter eve celebrations" also left people on edge. These sectarian fissures did not remain open at all times, but the annual cycle of religious holidays meant that on a regular basis, "cultural differences that may have gone unnoticed in everyday life could become more foreboding and visible."[39] Thus, Greeks, Jews, Turks, and Armenians could live side by side in Smyrna, but their civic identity was knit together by the shared experience of parochialism, jealousy, and sectarian rivalry. In such a community, as Mansel puts it, "in a crisis, nationality could fall like a sword."[40]

In the years immediately following the First World War, however, the town presented a confident, modern, and polyglot façade to the world. "Young women wore dresses only two inches below the knee"; along with the 500 cafés, 13 cinemas and numerous rag-time bars, 34 newspapers were published, including eleven Greek, seven Turkish, five Armenian, five Hebrew, and four French.[41] A municipal event elicited speeches in Greek, Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian and Ladino.[42] This era of the town's history ended in 1922, when the militant ambitions for a Greater Greece clashed with Ataturk's emerging Turkish national state. Smyrna's large Greek population was burned out and driven into the sea, while "Smyrna's Muslims and Jews showed the same lethal indifference to the fate of other races

that Greeks and Armenians had displayed towards each other during previous massacres."[43] One Greek survivor, disembarking in Alexandria, burned her shoes on the beach because they had trod upon so many corpses.

Smyrna, now renamed Izmir, fell from a population of 225,000 in 1914 to 154,000 in 1927, even with an infusion of Turkish refugees from what was now northern Greece. Exports fell by half, and the agriculture of that entire region of Turkey was devastated. The destruction of the commercial relationships meant that no one was arranging to buy the figs and sultanas; "the 1923 harvest was not even picked." Mansel concludes: "Blackened ruins, heaps of stone and weed-choked rubble, the haunt of wandering goats, continued to disfigure the heart of the city into the 1950s."[44]

Zanzibar

In *War of Words, War of Stones,* Jonathon Glassman examines the background of the 1964 revolution that killed or drove out a quarter of the Arab population of Zanzibar, and led to the assimilation of the island into the much larger country of Tanganyika (subsequently renamed Tanzania). "Ethnic identity in East Africa," Glassman notes, "had always been flexible," but something changed in the mid-twentieth century.[45] Traditionally, the coastal region perceived itself as an exceptional place that boasted a uniquely tolerant culture.[46] Arab politicians protested that agitators were importing racism from the mainland and that they, themselves, did not think in ethnic terms at all.[47] Glassman dissects the problems involved with constructing a viable Zanzibari national identity in the waning years of British rule, given the lingering divisions between former slaves and former slaveowners. He argues, however, that the path to viewing Arabs as unwelcome "immigrants" in Africa was a long one, and that the purveyors of incendiary rumors had to remain vigilant against their followers' "slipping toward moderation."[48]

In contrast to the port towns of the Levant, Zanzibar was overwhelmingly Muslim. There were some Hindu merchants of Indian origin; the fault line, however, was not between faiths but between the landowners

("Arabs") and the workers on the great estates where cloves and coconuts grew ("Africans"). Islam promised equality, but some portions of the population were seen as more authentically and completely assimilated to Islam than others. Intermarriage did take place, but only between Arab men and African women, a fact that continued to rankle.[49] While slavery had ended under British rule, menial jobs still carried the stigma of slave work, and the descendants of slaves often fought to deny their ancestry if they had any ambition. Ethnic identity was permeable only in the sense that social climbers could strive to identify themselves ever more closely with an Islamic and Arabian ideal.

Although some Arabs had a rough reputation – notably the crews that manned the dhows that came down from Oman – the stereotype more generally was that mainland Africans lacked civilization and were prone to violence and theft.[50] The British tended to assume that the Arabs were the natural rulers, although in the spirit of "martial races" doctrine they brought in mainlanders to serve as the island's police force.[51] Glassman takes pains to point out that this Arab-African binary was not a novelty devised by the British as a divide-and-conquer mechanism; the Arab view of African history was that Arabs had arrived from the north as a civilizing force. Thus, when pro-Zanzibar politicians warned that mainland dominance would mean "leaves and hides" for clothing, they were speaking from a tradition that predated European rule.[52]

African political organizers, meanwhile, paid close attention to decolonization movements elsewhere on the continent and began to organize accordingly. Glassman remarks that the phrase "sons of the soil" was overused on both sides, but the logic of this expression worked against cosmopolitanism and favored the mainlanders, who began to claim that the Arabs owned the trees on the plantations, but the land itself remained African.[53] In the 1940s, an African Youth Union emerged to which "only Africans could apply."[54] Enforcing an Arab-African split in Zanzibar, where the social boundary lines had been kept strategically vague, required forcing people to display their allegiance in a public way. Zealots policed the behavior of their friends and neighbors, demanding adherence to boycotts of businesses owned – and even buses driven – by members of the rival group.[55] Arabs complained that the traditional respect had been

withdrawn, and "nowadays they must endure rude remarks when walking on the street."[56] In this climate, ethnically-charged jokes, nicknames, and epithets that had seemed jocular in the past now sounded like threats.

By the early 1960s, Africanist rhetoric construed Arabs as "immigrants" and conceited former slave-owners who did not deserve citizenship in the postcolonial era.[57] Even so, escalating to communal violence would require additional motivating tactics. Glassman dismisses the notion that crowds were simply instructed on what to feel and what to do; you cannot force-feed these views, "as with a goose." Rather, rumors, suspicions, and riots all worked to reinforce each other in a gradual process of accretion.[58] The display of blood and mangled human body parts, in particular, fuelled rumors of imminent violence, or violence that had already taken place and cried out for vengeance. By 1963, a shark-bitten severed leg washed up on a beach was enough to set off waves of anxiety about barbaric practices, conspiracy, and the need for prompt retaliation.[59] When the communal violence really got underway, some perpetrators made sure that everyone present took up a spear and stabbed, even after there were no living bodies left.[60] Obligating the reluctant bystander to participate in a public way in front of witnesses resembled the peer pressure tactics of the bus boycotts. This underscores Glassman's theoretical point that violent subjectivities, like cosmopolitan ones, are as much the product of practice as of premeditation.

War of Words, War of Stones takes a more comparative approach than the other books under review, although the comparisons are to communal violence in Eastern Europe and in India rather than to other formerly cosmopolitan port towns per se. Considering all of these cases, Glassman argues against what might be called the organic metaphor for communal violence (it has roots, it germinates in the right soil and grows, it will inevitably flower with disastrous consequences). Instead, he proposes that communal violence can *cause* or *create* the violent subjectivities that we often assume must have been meticulously engineered beforehand. The work of rumor and fear is crucial here. The rumor of a riot can spawn a real one, which in turn lends credibility to the next rumor. Every suspicion and every outbreak of violence weighs in the balance against the archive of memories built up over years of cosmopolitan practice. While memories of coexis-

tence are powerful, so are memories of betrayal and atrocity. Eventually, the practice of violent subjectivity becomes the new normal.

Rangoon and Penang

In *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, Sunil Amrith depicts a world of connectedness, coexistence, and migration that predated European colonialism. Of course, the steamboat, the Suez Canal, and British dominance intensified the exchange of goods and the movement of people. The labor-recruiting crimps and overseers (*kanganies*) packed off Tamil villagers into debt servitude on the Malayan rubber plantations. Industrialization fuelled even more intense migration as new jobs opened up: by 1930, Burma had nearly one thousand factories, and Malaya dominated the world's rubber market, producing one million tons a year.[61] In the twentieth century, wars and postcolonial upheavals would sever long-standing ties across the Bay and leave migrant populations abruptly stranded as unwelcome minorities in new nation-states.

Amrith summarizes the look and feel of ports like Rangoon, Penang, and Singapore in a passage worth quoting in full:

> The "common practices" on the streets of the port towns – practices of eating together, of sharing public space, of participating in others' festivities – have had an enduring life, and they constitute, in themselves, an archive of interactions. Perhaps the key "expectation" that was "normally met" was the expectation of mobility – this was a world in which people expected that they would move back and forth across the sea.[62]

There is some evidence that this extended to an embrace of mobile, mutable, or multifaceted identities as well. When the port towns of the Bay of Bengal acquired printing presses, they unashamedly served a multilingual and cross-ethnic constituency. In the Straits Settlements, "many of the early Tamil Muslim publishing houses were backed by Tamil Hindu or Chinese capital."[63] Su Lin Lewis has explored the vigorous crop of newspapers that sprang up to meet the needs of diverse readerships. Those

published in Tamil and Chinese served to affirm group identity even in the conditions of diaspora.[64] However, Asian-run newspapers such as the *Straits Echo* were published in English to enable "multi-ethnic Asian elites to speak to and read about each other across the Indian Ocean and beyond, absorbing new forms of thought and drawing on each other's models of political articulation."[65] Club culture both emphasized the centrality of trade to civic identity and signaled the presence of social divisions. Penang had four different Chambers of Commerce, one established by the British authorities, and separate "Chinese," "Indian," and "Muslim" ones.[66]

Amrith is not just concerned with the literate and the mercantile, however. He devotes most of his book to life observed on a very intimate scale focusing on mail-order brides and ordinary workers in the "grog-shops and lodging-houses."[67] He is especially interested in at least outwardly syncretic forms of religion. Sir Richard Temple described *badr-mokan* shrines built by Muslim sailors that were held "equally holy" by the adherents of other faiths. One shrine popular with seafarers was designed as a fusion of styles and architectural elements, combining "the Burmese pagoda and the Muslim mosque."[68] The Muslim saint Badr al-Din Awilya' was worshipped "in coastal Burma as a nat by Burmese Buddhists, a Deva by Hindus, as a spirit by Chinese…"[69] However, the theory of antagonistic tolerance was invented to describe situations quite similar to this one. Given the high-risk lifestyles of seafarers, it is also possible that this ecumenical piety could have been just another form of pragmatic opportunism, in the supernatural rather than in the commercial realm. What better insurance policy than a diversified portfolio of saints?

As in Turkey and elsewhere, nationalist ideologues mistrusted fluid identities and statements like "Rangoon is not Burma" which set up the cosmopolitan port town as the nation-state's antithesis. The main focus of the last few chapters of Amrith's book is on the fate of the Tamil diaspora, which despite its mobile past in the colonial and precolonial eras found itself on the wrong side of an epidemic of border-drawing and score-settling beginning in the 1930s. Asking these people to go "home" to India missed the point. Amrith notes: "For many Tamil Malaysian families, the old rubber plantations are invested with layers of memory and meaning: memories of suffering or of triumph over adversity…"[70] Some of these same

workers, clearing the jungle to build houses for themselves, discovered the ruins of temples built by Tamil migrants centuries before. Nationalist ideologues who proposed "Burma for the Burmese" and "Malaya for the Malayans" could only do so by contravening the legacy of centuries of movement across the Bay. Nationalist dogmas about authenticity and autarky have threatened to sever those links forever.

Of the books under review, Amrith's does the most to carry the story up to the present day. While he notes continuing conflict as Hindu temples in Malaysia are destroyed to make way for new highways and tracts of housing – 10 000 people protested this on the streets of Kuala Lumpur in 2007 and were dispersed with water cannons and tear gas – in other ways recent developments prove that the legacies of past coexistence are proving surprisingly durable. An ancient tradition of religious pilgrimages back to India has been facilitated by the internet and cheap air travel.[71] In Singapore, the Loyang Tua Pek Kong temple is a new and popular place of worship built around a diverse pantheon of religious statues salvaged on an isolated beach near an industrial estate.[72] Finally, the Malaysian government found itself under international pressure to honor its cosmopolitan past; in 2008, UNESCO designated two neighborhoods as World Heritage Sites because they bore "testimony to a living multi-cultural heritage and tradition of Asia."[73]

The emergence of cosmopolitan memory as part of the heritage industry is an interesting new development. We may eventually even see "invented traditions" of cosmopolitan coexistence in some places.[74] However, it may be difficult to develop this sort of commemoration in port towns where ethnic cleansing was both more violent and more complete than around the Bay of Bengal. In Salonica, the streets have been renamed, and rearranged; in Smyrna, even the town's name itself has been changed to Izmir; and in Zanzibar, Glassman encountered many people who assured him that slavery had existed there until it was overthrown in the revolution of 1964.

Conclusion

I have argued for the need to move beyond merely using the word "cosmopolitan" as a conveniently vague adjective for the flavor of the typical port town, or deploying it in an unreflective way down the lines of what Dieter Haller has called "banal Mediterraneanism" – "the simple nostalgic reference to [values such as] tolerance [and] openness."[75] A critical engagement with what cosmopolitanism has meant in practice also requires sensitivity to the motives of those who have invoked the term in self-interested ways in the past. The British, faced with nationalist independence movements, retorted that "the cosmopolitan character of the Malayan population does not easily lend itself to political progress."[76]

In fact, Biray Kolluoğlu and Meltem Toksöz have issued a call for "decolonizing the concept" of cosmopolitanism, which has featured too often as a proxy for a "vision of 'one world' which itself is a euphemism for 'First World.'"[77] Even the term "port town" has been criticized as Eurocentric in some contexts. For example, does privileging Izmir's function as a nineteenth-century haven for European merchants and a window onto the world economy obscure its historic, more eclectic role as a "city of commerce" and relay point for caravans?[78] Behind this is, perhaps, the orientalist assumption that only outsiders could build and create, leaving the ignorant locals simply to play the role of destroyer. Cristina Pallini's meticulous study of the Turkish architectural and urban design choices made in rebuilding Izmir, *after* the Great Fire of 1922, stands as a reproach to the tendency in some other scholarship to present the post-cosmopolitan era as simply a period of stagnation or collapse in the absence of Greeks and other foreigners.[79]

However, it would be hard to agree with Kolluoğlu and Toksöz in their decision to treat the dissolution of the old Ottoman-era port town communities as a *necessary* step in the process of modernization, and dismiss cosmopolitanism itself as, in their words, a "foolish chimera."[80] While acknowledging the reasons that these enclaves were resented, particularly when they took the form of havens for plutocratic elites, we also need to preserve the agency of people for whom the cosmopolitan ideal seemed quite real. Some spent a lifetime grieving its loss. As late as the 1970s,

Smyrniot Greeks—resettled in Piraeus – continued to gripe about the stifling "narrow-minded" mentality of their Athenian neighbors.[81] The Egyptian-born Jew, Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff, wrote eloquently of what she called Levantine values. She defined a Levantine as "a potentially successful crossbreed of two or more cultures" accustomed from birth to regarding a situation from multiple points of view.[82] She argued for a kind of individualism in the face of sectarian and nationalist temptation; the Levantine will "know that a person, however worthless, counts more than principles, however sacred."[83]

Kahanoff's thought anticipated, by more than half a century, a concept only recently popularized by Steven Vertovec. "Superdiversity" describes situations in which there are multiple ways to *be* diverse. Avoiding some of the familiar dead ends of the debate over multiculturalism, Vertovec describes a "'plurality of affiliations' (recognizing multiple identifications and axes of differentiation, only some of which concern ethnicity)…"[84] According to Kahanoff, this ancient wisdom of Levantine tolerance had been betrayed by twentieth-century political and military developments. She continued to agitate and articulate her Levantine position after immigrating to Israel.

After a purge or collapse, does cosmopolitanism vanish without a trace? In an important new book, Caroline Humphrey and Vera Skvirskaja offer a different way to think about the problem.[85] Taking as their starting point the existence of *post*-cosmopolitan cities, they situate each instance of tolerance in a historical setting. The memory of having once been cosmopolitan does not vanish quickly. Moreover, the refugees from one destroyed haven of tolerance can regroup and start a tradition in a new location. This, in turn, suggests that some of the Levantine attitude so admired by Kahanoff may itself have been prompted by the recent and historically specific experience of *intolerance.* Alexandria received an ample share of Greek refugees from Smyrna, for example.[86]

Tolerant places act, among other things, as magnets for people who are fleeing intolerance. This suggests a different way to read a famous aphorism of Stuart Hall's. Hall, himself a Jamaican immigrant, remarked that when he asked someone in London where they are from, he had come to expect "an extremely long story."[87] What, though, is the effect of *hearing*

that long story? If two people share their (respective) long stories, what conclusions will they reach? This sheds light, from an unexpected direction, on why migrants might elect to preserve some customary practices while allowing others to lapse. Muslims and Jews, freshly arrived in France from North Africa, chose to carry with them a tradition of sharing holiday foods with neighbors of a different faith.[88] An outburst of intolerance produces its own archive of memories, to be sure, but once those memories are shared, the bitterly learnt lessons can find expression as a fresh cosmopolitan community elsewhere, founded on the stranger's insight and the refugee's hard-won wisdom.

If cosmopolitanism is, first and foremost, an archive of memories, and choices made based upon those memories, it is not necessary to posit a single decisive Fall from the cosmopolitan Eden. Communities vacillate, losing and regaining forms of coexistence. For historians, this opens up the possibility of reading the cosmopolitan port town as dynamic, rather than static, as historically contingent rather than timeless, and as deliberate rather than accidental.

Sammanfattning

Flerspråkiga och kosmopolitiska hamnstäder är en välbekant bakgrund inom maritim historiografi, men antropologer, sociologer, filosofer och kulturhistoriker har i allmänhet närmat sig begreppet "kosmopolitisk" på ett annorlunda sätt än maritimhistoriker. Denna recensionsartikel undersöker de teoretiska insikter som idag finns tillgängliga rörande dessa förhållanden. I texten föreslås även ett sätt att samla empiriska bevis om styrkor och svagheter beträffande kosmopolitism: närmare bestämt genom att studerar dessa samhällen i samband med större påfrestningar, vid eller nära tidpunkten för deras kollaps. Nya verk om Thessaloniki, Smyrna (dagens Izmir), Zanzibar, Rangoon och Pinang ger en grund för jämförande studier, och även ett historiskt perspektiv på vad som alltför ofta representeras i vaga termer som en förlorad guldålder av tolerans. När vi hänvisar till samexistens som "bräcklig", kan metaforen av krossbart och skört glas vara vilseledande. Bevisen tyder snarare på att samexistensen ökade och minskade allteftersom individer ingick allianser och gjorde taktiska justeringar. Detta skapar behovet av en särskild vokabulär, inklusive termer som "vänligt sinnad fiendskap" och "antagonistisk tolerans". Nya teorier om den "post-kosmopolitiska staden" tyder på att denna pendelrörelse också kan fortsätta i stor skala under längre perioder, vartefter flyktingar omgrupperar och återskapar toleranta värderingar i nya miljöer.

Notes

[1] Rhoads Murphey, "On the Evolution of the Port City", in F. Broeze, ed., *Brides of the Sea: Port Cities of Asia from the 16th-20th Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), p. 225.
[2] Ibid., p. 227.
[3] Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 32. See also Michael Pearson, "Littoral Society: The Concept and the Problems", *Journal of World History* 17, no. 4 (2006), pp. 353-373.
[4] Henk Driessen, "Mediterranean Port Cities: Cosmopolitanism Reconsidered", *History and Anthropology* 16, no. 1 (March 2005), pp. 130, 131, 134.
[5] Ibid., p. 135.
[6] Ibid., p. 138.
[7] Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims, and Jews, 1430-1950* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004); Philip Mansel, *Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean* (London: John Murray, 2010); Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2011); Sunil S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
[8] Driessen, "Mediterranean Port Cities", art. cit., p. 130.
[9] Robert A. Rothstein, "How It Was Sung in Odessa: At the Intersection of Russian and Yiddish Folk Culture", *Slavic Review* 60, no. 4 (Winter 2001), pp. 781-801 notes a number of proverbs and book titles in this vein.
[10] Carola Hein, "Port Cities" in P. Clark, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Cities in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 813.
[11] Çağlar Keyder, "Port-cities in the Belle Epoque", in B. Kolluoğlu and M. Toksöz, eds., *Cities of the Mediterranean: From the Ottomans to the Present Day* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), p. 14.
[12] Su Lin Lewis, "Print and Colonial Port Cultures of the Indian Ocean Littoral: Penang and Rangoon," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society,* Vol. 82, No. 2 (December 2009), p. 13 mentions the concept of a "diasporic public sphere" in ports such as Singapore.
[13] Driessen, "Mediterranean Port Cities," art. cit., p. 134; Biray Kolluoğlu and Meltem Toksöz, "Mapping out the Eastern Mediterranean: Toward a Cartography of Cities of Commerce", in B. Kolluoğlu and M. Toksöz, eds. *Cities of the Mediterranean,* op. cit., pp. 1-13.
[14] Saskia Sassen, "The Global City: Introducing a Concept", *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 9, no. 2 (Winter/Spring 2005), pp. 27-43.
[15] Mansel, *Levant,* op. cit., p. 314.
[16] Vera Skvirskaja, "At the City's Social Margins: Selective Cosmopolitans in Odessa", in C. Humphrey and V. Skvirskaja, eds. *Post-Cosmopolitan Cities: Explorations of Urban Coexistence* (New York: Berghahn, 2012), pp. 94-119.
[17] Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).
[18] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2006), pp. 70-71.

[19] Elijah Anderson, *The Cosmopolitan Canopy: Race and Civility in Everyday Life* (New York: Norton, 2011).
[20] Ash Amin, "Ethnicity and the Multicultural City: Living with Diversity", *Environment and Planning A* 34, no. 6 (June 2002), p. 969.
[21] Amin, "Ethnicity", art. cit., p. 973.
[22] Robert M. Hayden, "Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans", *Current Anthropology* 43, no. 2 (April 2002), pp. 205-231. I am indebted to Catherine Baker for this reference.
[23] Mansel, *Levant*, op. cit., p. 195.
[24] Mazower, *Salonica*, op. cit., p. 8.
[25] Ibid., pp. 80, 431.
[26] Ibid., p. 100.
[27] Ibid., p. 82.
[28] Ibid., pp. 100-101.
[29] Maria Vassilikou, "Greeks and Jews in Salonika and Odessa: Inter-ethnic Relations in Cosmopolitan Port Cities", *Jewish Culture and History* 4, no. 2, pp. 168-169.
[30] Ibid. p. 165.
[31] Mazower, *Salonica*, op. cit., pp. 73-74.
[32] Ibid., p. 74.
[33] Ibid., p. 75.
[34] Ibid., p. 410.
[35] Mansel, *Levant*, op. cit., pp. 275, 356.
[36] Sibel Zandi-Sayek, *Ottoman Izmir: The Rise of a Cosmopolitan Port, 1840-1880* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 181.
[37] Ibid., p. 156.
[38] Mansel, *Levant*, op. cit., pp. 172, 174.
[39] Zandi-Sayek, *Ottoman Izmir*, op. cit., p. 159.
[40] Mansel, *Levant*, op. cit., p. 137.
[41] Ibid., p. 208.
[42] Ibid., p. 211.
[43] Ibid., p. 217.
[44] Ibid., pp. 228-229.
[45] Glassman, *War*, op. cit., p. 135.
[46] Ibid., pp. 62, 84, 89, 107, 129.
[47] Ibid., pp. 106, 241-243.
[48] Ibid., p. 227.
[49] Ibid., pp. 139-141.
[50] Ibid., pp. 39, 195.
[51] Ibid, p. 186.
[52] Ibid, p.157.
[53] Ibid, pp. 129, 207-210.
[54] Ibid, p. 113.
[55] Ibid, p. 164.
[56] Ibid, p. 167.
[57] Ibid, p. 203.
[58] Ibid, pp. 230-237.
[59] Ibid, pp. 217, 255.
[60] Ibid, pp. 227-229.

[61] Amrith, *Crossing*, op. cit., pp. 150, 157.
[62] Ibid, p. 180.
[63] Ibid, p. 166.
[64] Lewis, "Print and Colonial Port Cultures," art. cit., p. 14.
[65] Ibid., pg. 15; see Vassilikou, "Greeks and Jews", art. cit., p. 159 for similar role played by French-language periodicals in Salonica.
[66] Lewis, "Print and Colonial Port Cultures", art. cit., p. 12.
[67] Amrith, *Crossing*, op. cit., p. 149.
[68] Ibid., p. 89.
[69] Ibid., p. 89.
[70] Ibid., p. 280.
[71] Ibid., pp. 279-280.
[72] Ibid., pp. 277-278.
[73] Ibid., p. 281.
[74] For a very suggestive account of ambivalent nostalgia and urban rebranding, see Deborah Starr, "Recuperating cosmopolitan Alexandria: Circulation of narratives and narratives of circulation", *Cities* 22, no. 3 (2005), pp. 217-228.
[75] Dieter Haller, "The Cosmopolitan Mediterranean: Myth and Reality," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Bd. 129, H. 1 (2004), pp. 29-47.
[76] Lewis, "Print and Colonial Port Cultures", art. cit., p. 20. The first person to write about cosmopolitan port towns or "plural societies" in a social science context was a British civil servant based in Burma, J.S. Furnivall.
[77] Kolluoğlu and Toksöz, "Mapping Out", art. cit., p. 5.
[78] Vilma Hastaoglou-Martinidis, "The Cartography of Harbor Construction in Eastern Mediterranean Cities: Technical and Urban Modernization in the Late Nineteenth Century", in B. Kolluoğlu and M. Toksöz, eds., *Cities of the Mediterranean: From the Ottomans to the Present Day* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), p. 80.
[79] Cristina Pallini, "Geographic Theatres, Port Landscapes and Architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean: Salonica, Alexandria, Izmir", in B. Kolluoğlu and M. Toksöz, eds., *Cities of the Mediterranean: From the Ottomans to the Present Day* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), pp. 61-77.
[80] Kolluoğlu and Toksöz, "Mapping Out", art. cit., p. 4.
[81] Driessen, "Mediterranean Port Cities", art. cit., p.135.
[82] Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff, *Mongrels or Marvels: The Levantine Writings of Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff*, ed. D. A. Starr and S. Somekh (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 198.
[83] Kahanoff, *Mongrels*, p. 107. I discuss Kahanoff further in Isaac Land, "The Tolerant Coast", in C. Mathieson, ed., *Sea Narratives: Cultural Responses to the Sea, 1600-Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).
[84] Steven Vertovec, "Super-diversity and its implications", in *Anthropology of Migration and Multiculturalism*, ed. Steven Vertovec (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 89.
[85] Caroline Humphrey and Vera Skvirskaja, eds. *Post-Cosmopolitan Cities: Explorations of Urban Coexistence* (New York: Berghahn, 2012).
[86] Driessen, "Mediterranean Port Cities", art. cit., p. 136.
[87] As quoted in "Jazz fan, hipster, and a leftwing hero: the remarkable journey of Stuart Hall", *Guardian*, 17 August 2013. http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/aug/18/professor-stuart-hall-multiculturalism-film Accessed 18 June 2015.
[88] Maud S. Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France: History of a Conflict* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 102.